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World War II Memory Project: Guy Andre Rene Bissonnette

During World War II, many men and women sacrificed their lives for the sake of their nation. Thousands of Canadians enlisted with different sections of the Canadian Military during World War II to help protect the safety and freedom of their own nation. Many of these men and women were young and just finishing school. Guy Andre Rene Bissonnette was born September 10th, 1919 to Arthur and Rosa Bissonnette (Royal Canadian Air Force, Attestation Paper). At the tender age of 22, Guy went missing in air operations and was presumed dead on July 26th, 1942 (Province of Manitoba, Official Registration of Death). Guy grew up in Norwood, Manitoba with one brother and three sisters. Guy attended school until grade 10; he then started working with two different companies. After working as a truck driver and mechanic for a few years, Guy decided to train with the Royal Canadian Air Force and become an Air Gunner, after training he enlisted with the Air Force and went to battle overseas. Guy did not spend much time overseas before being presumed dead (Attestation Paper). While overseas, women took jobs that were left by men and the United States Army was planning on building a railway to Alaska.

Guy Bissonnette was born in Lorette, Manitoba. He grew up at 155 Horace Street in Norwood, Manitoba in a bilingual family with 4 siblings and his parents (Attestation Paper). He had three sisters Georgette, Aimie, and Olivine and one brother named William (R.C.A.F. Lists Two Winnipeg Casualties). Guy attended Provencher School from grade 4 till grade 7. He then went to Tache Norwood for grades eight, nine, and ten. At 5 feet 9 inches, he was not very athletic. He played baseball, but not in a competitive league. Guy also liked swimming in the summer and skating in the winter. On top of playing occasional sports, Guy liked listening to the radio (Attestation Paper). “Guy was a healthy and tall man. He was described as swathy, rough and ready Frenchman. Though not having good academic qualifications he had been working for 2 years (Attestation Paper).” After studying at Tache Norwood, Guy studied at St. Paul’s College for two months. Guy’s records state that he only attended to school till grade 10. After finishing at St. Paul’s College, Guy was employed as a mechanic and shipping clerk at Massey Harris from 1938 till 1941. Bissonnette also worked between 1937 and 1941 at Gauthier’s wood yard as a truck driver. In 1941, Guy Bissonnette began training to become an Air Gunner in the Royal Canadian Air Force (Attestation Paper).

Guy stopped working for Massey Harris and Gauthier’s wood yard and not much longer; he attained his wings at Mountain View Air School. Guy then began to train to become an Air Gunner in the Royal Canadian Air Force (Four Manitobans In Air Casualties). An Air Gunner is the member of the air force who controls machine guns and automatic cannons in the aircraft, but in the modern world, these weapons do not need someone to control them, but instead are automatic. Guy Bissonnette joined 78 Squadron of the Royal Canadian Air Force, which fought overseas during the Second World War (Attestation Paper).

On January 25th, 1941 Guy Andre Rene Bissonnette enlisted with the Royal Canadian Air Force in Winnipeg, Manitoba (Guy Bissonnette’s Military Files). Sergeant Guy Bissonnette was deployed in early May, he sent a letter to his parents on May 15th, 1942 to inform them that he had arrived in England. On July 26th, 1942 less then 3 months after being deployed, Sergeant Bissonnette was presumed dead after air operations (Four Manitobans In Air Casualties). The ranking of sergeant was the ranking above the ranking of corporal (Dictionary.com). Since Guy Bissonnette was lost without a trace, there is no way of knowing where Guy may have died or what his squad was doing in that area at the time. All information known about the death of Guy Andre Rene Bissonnette is that he went missing in air operations and was later presumed dead for official purposes.

During the short period of time Guy was overseas, women began to play a much more important role in Canada. While the men were in combat overseas, women began to work in the industries that mostly only men worked in before being deployed. An industry women worked in was mining. The provincial government of Manitoba had permitted the women to work in the mining industry a few days prior to the death of Sergeant Bissonnette. The women were not allowed to work underground, but all the work above ground was acceptable. ("Women as Mine Workers Is Manitoba Innovation"). They had a tremendous impact on the mining industry during World War II, since there was a high need for the metals. June 1942, The United States Army began planning the construction of a new railway to connect Alaska to the rest of the United States. The American government was seriously considering the building of the railroad and engineers were surveying the route (U.S. Army Studies Rail Route To Alaska).

After being presumed dead on July 26th, 1942 there were no traces of Guy Bissonnette. Therefore, Guy has no known grave, but is remembered at the Runnymede Memorial in Englegreen Field, Surrey, England and is also commemorated at the Ste. Anne War Memorial in Ste. Anne, Manitoba. Guy Bissonnette died at a very young age. This shows that he was truly a man for others. Before enlisting, Guy Bissonnette was well aware of the risks of going to war, but was ready to serve for his country. Unfortunately, Guy’s life ended too soon and will forever be remembered for his courageous service.